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AUTHOR Vineyard, Edwin E.
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ABSTRACT

Small, rural community junior colleges, comprising half of America's community-junior college movement, have special characteristics, problems, and needs which have been ignored by governmental and policy-making bodies. Educational delivery at the community college level suffers unique problems because it takes place in a milieu of sparse population and limited opportunities for employment, cultural activities, and full social services. On the other hand, these colleges have a great opportunity to initiate and conduct programs and services to enhance educational, economic, cultural, recreational, and civic development in rural areas. It is recommended that the following principles adopted by the Task Force on Rural Community Colleges be circulated to public boards, agencies, legislatures, and Congress: (1) equal educational opportunity demands that public policy-making bodies provide for comprehensive curriculum and service programs in all community colleges regardless of size or geographic location; (2) equity in funding depends on allowing for higher operation costs per unit in smaller, rural community colleges; (3) accreditation evaluation should be done by representatives from peer institutions; (4) federal funds are not equalizing education for students of two-year colleges (in fact, existing inequalities are increasing); and (5) development of rural community college literature and a research base is vital. (RS)

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THE INVISIBLE WALL:

A Report on the Status of the Rural Community College in America

"Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense."
Robert Frost in Mending Wall

A Presentation of the Task Force on Rural Community Colleges of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges

Prepared by

Dr. Edwin E. Vineyard, President
Northern Oklahoma College
Tonkawa, Oklahoma

January 1978

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS OF THE AACJC TASK FORCE

ON RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Dr. William H. McCoy, President
Lord Fairfax Community College
Middletown, Virginia 22645
(Chairman)

Dr. Chester H. Gausman, President
Central Technical Community College Area
Grand Island, Nebraska 68801

Dr. Donald G. Lindahl, President
Flathead Valley Community College
Kalispell, Montana 59901

Dr. Herbert E. Phillips, President
Lake City Community College
Lake City, Florida 32055

Dr. Edwin E. Vineyard, President
Northern Oklahoma College
Tonkawa, OK 74653

Dr. Dale P. Wren, President
Feather River College
Quincy, California 95971

Dr. Richard E. Wilson (Ex Officio)
Vice President for Programs
AACJC
Washington, D.C. 20036

FOREWORD

This publication is the result of the groundswell of interest which is currently being manifest among the AACJC institutional membership in the special characteristics, problems, and needs of smaller, rural community junior colleges. Such institutions comprise approximately one-half the constituency of the Association, and thus their interests and their concerns become those of this organization as a whole.

This monograph is published in response to a request of the Task Force on Rural Community Colleges established in 1976 by the Board of Directors. Although the views expressed are those of the Task Force members, the author is Dr. Edwin E. Vineyard, President of Northern Oklahoma College, Tonkawa. Dr. Vineyard has held this post since 1965. Prior to assuming the presidency, he was professor and director of graduate studies for the College of Education at Oklahoma State University and has held teaching and administrative posts at two other regional universities in that state. Dr. Vineyard is the author of one textbook and some twenty-five journal articles in areas of academic interest. He has served in numerous leadership roles in higher education and junior college groups.

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THE CHARGE OF THE TASK FORCE

In response to both formal and informal expressions from representatives of the 600 or so institutions within the Association which consider themselves to be rural and/or small and to have special and unique problems related to this characteristic, the Board of Directors established this Task Force on the Rural Community College. The Chairman of the Board, Dr. Richard Hagemeyer, charged the Task Force to "focus on issues of concern to community colleges enrolling small numbers of people but serving large geographical areas."

The charge further stated that it was a possibility that certain funding practices used by states may be unrealistic for the small college and thus penalize its students. It suggested that this and "other critical issues confronting rural community colleges" be examined. It stated that "the objective of the Task Force would be to identify and discuss these issues and agree on what should be done or at least what should be tried." It was mentioned that the Task Force's recommendations might take the form of position papers, proposal actions for AACJC, or actions for other organizations or governmental agencies.

In response to this charge, the Task Force met for two days of deliberations in October of 1976. As a result of discussions, five position papers emerged and were adopted as representing the combined thinking of the group on key topics and issues. These were distributed broadly to the institutional members of the AACJC under the following titles:

1. Equal Opportunity for the Small/Rural College
2. Financing the Small College
3. Small Colleges and Accrediting Agencies
4. Federal and State Constraints on Small College Programs
5. Developing the Literature and Research Support for Rural Community Colleges

These papers were presented in a special session at the AACJC convention held in Denver in April of 1977. The papers were ratified unanimously at that meeting and passed on for consideration by the Board of Directors. Among the more significant of the recommendations contained in those documents was one which called for the writing and publication of a monograph containing and expanding upon the premises and principles of these position papers. This publication represents the response of the Association to this recommendation.

Throughout its work the Task Force found the staff, officers, and directors of AACJC intensely interested in this whole realm and highly cooperative in assisting with these efforts at analysis and recommendation. The encouragement of Dr. Edwin Gleazer, the assistance of Dr. Richard Wilson, and the concern of Dr. Richard Hagemeyer are especially recognized as is the leadership of Dr. William McCoy as Task Force chairman.

WHAT IS RURAL?

As is often the case with academicians, members of the Task Force felt uncomfortable without a proper definition of terms. The vagueness of the basic term of reference, "rural," was a source of such discomfort. What is rural? Are the problems associated with being rural essentially the same as those of being small, since most rural institutions (and few urban ones) are indeed small? Do outlying state institutions have largely the same problems as do community supported ones? Is a college of 1,500 enrollment in a small city of 35,000 population rural? Is "rural" a broad category into which all institutions other than those distinctly "urban" tend to fit? Is the size of the total population base or its centrality of location the criterion of urban-rural definition? What about suburban institutions? Is the size of the enrollment or the size of the population served the basis of classification?

As might be surmised, the Task Force did not resolve all these basic questions. Instead the members moved toward an operational definition that a rural community college is one which is regarded as such by its own leadership. Basically, the Task Force tended to think of the rural community college as publicly supported, located in a center of under 100,000 population, and serving a broad geographic area with a program with an identifiable thrust toward comprehensiveness. A previous AACJC monograph used the criterion of service area population of 100,000 and under as the basis for distinction (15). The Task Force regarded this as one of the legitimate means for classification, but was not bound by that definition only.

There is some variance in reported statistics and estimates of how many rural community colleges there are in the United States. This may be because of the different definitions being employed, the ambiguity of enrollment data in the reporting of part-time students, and the lack of recent nationwide surveys or studies of relevance to this sector. In general terms, it would be safe to state that there are more than 600 rural or nonurban community junior colleges in the nation. More than 500 of these are public institutions. Half of the institutional membership of AACJC could be regarded as rural under the broad definition cited. Approximately half of the rural institutions are located in population centers of 10,000 or fewer. Some two-thirds of these colleges enroll fewer than 1,000 students. The full-time student population served is estimated at over a half-million and total students in contact each year in the several millons. (11,15,20)

If these statistics have any level of credibility whatsoever, one must be impressed by them. The sheer numbers of such institutions is impressive, and their potential impact in service communities across the nation is overwhelming. Surely this important and significant sector of public education

deserves attention and examination by educators, researchers, and public policy-making and governmental bodies at all levels. Certainly this segment, inclusive of half its membership, deserves the attention and study of the Association itself. The Association must be alert to the needs and the problems of this sector and apply its vast resources of expertise to the alleviation and solution of these. The Association has the unfulfilled potential to become the cohesive structure within which these institutions may organize to bring about greater public awareness of their unique contributions and their special problems.

THE RURAL MILIEU

The rural environment has been described in the picturesque language of one of the Task Force members (Dr. Herbert E. "Swede" Phillips) as being a place "where only Indians have set foot, and where owls crossbreed with the chickens." Such descriptive language and the humor it exudes is accepted and enjoyed by those who work and struggle in educational endeavors in rural areas--- as long as it comes from one within the rural setting itself. The concept of urban superiority and rural inferiority is one which is becoming increasingly resented by rural people, including community college educators. This view is deeply ingrained in the culture and has been reinforced by literature, films, music, and other forms of art and media. Like other prejudicial attitudes, it may manifest itself in ways which are subtle and difficult to recognize. The failure of governmental and policy-making bodies to recognize the uniqueness of the problems of educational delivery at the community college level, along with other concerns, may be more illustrative of these subtle attitudinal factors than of deliberate neglect of such a large segment of the population and their needs.

In contradiction to the above view, it has been cited that with the exception of John F. Kennedy, every President of the United States in this century was either born or reared in a small town. While this would have been expected during the earlier history of the nation, it has persisted in spite of urbanization. Current Congressional leaders, as well as those immediately in the past, are predominately from small communities. Retired House Speaker Carl Albert of Oklahoma was known affectionately as "the little giant from Bugtussle." Those who comment upon this phenomenon, and on such circumstances as the tendency of President Carter to return to Plains, Georgia, so often during his extended campaign, suggest that within the scope of rural life problems are seen in better perspective. Some social scientists point out the greater cohesiveness of small towns and the tendency for the values of the family, the church, and other social institutions to be felt more strongly. Such have traditionally been termed "the backbone of America." (16)

However, all is not well in rural America. The Department of Agriculture reports that half the farm families have incomes under $3,600 with some 14 million rural people existing below the declared poverty level. During the 1960's the proportion of farm people over 55 years of age rose a third while the proportion of those under 14 declined by half. From 1940 until this decade small town businesses were dying at the rate of 16,000 annually as 800,000 people moved to the cities each year. (24)

More than 90% of all those counties suffering from critical health manpower shortages are rural in character. Indeed, there are 138 rural counties with over 500,000 inhabitants which have no resident physican. It is estimated that one million families in rural areas are inadequately housed. Rural areas with 25% of the nation's population have 60% of its

substandard housing. The median income of rural workers is about 20% less than their urban counterparts. The rural poor receive only 25% of all federal funds for income maintenance and only 30% of all food stamps even though they constitute 50% of the nation's poor. One third of all rural Americans are said to live in or on the borderline of poverty. (16,24)

Rural America is definitely not a homogeneous expanse of land on which similar people make their living doing similar things. It is important to understand its diversity and the complexity of its problems. The logging towns, the ranching areas, the farm communities, the mining towns, and the mill towns are all different from one another. Different geographic areas are often characterized by such single dominant industries and these affect the communities socially and educationally as well as economically. (16)

Lest any discussion of rural problems lead to overly dismal conclusions, it should be noted that there is some basis for optimism about the future. Concern for preservation of the ecology and a passion for the natural and the historical have led to a revival of interest in the rural areas. In recent years rural America has been making strong gains in population. The number of people living in rural areas is increasing at a faster rate now than is the number living in cities. Even those counties not adjacent to metropolitan areas are gaining. A great migration to the countryside has been occurring since 1970, reversing earlier trends. Rural development is given impetus by the current diversification and relocation movement in the industrial sector. People are seeking a simpler life with less violence, pressure, and pollution and with more space, green grass, and fresh air. (16)

Thus it appears that there is a brighter future for rural America and the local community colleges will both contribute to this development and benefit therefrom.

THE RURAL COMMUNITY JUNIOR COLLEGE

Rural America, the conservatory of social traditions, has been neglected from the perspective of particular problems which confront sparsely populated areas where only limited opportunities for employment, cultural activities, and comprehensive social services exist. The community college represents an ideal catalyst for addressing many of the problems of rural life whose solutions may lie in the education and development of people. Consistent with the purposes of the community college is the initiation and conduct of programs and services which could enhance educational, economic, cultural, recreational, and civic development in rural areas during the critical years ahead. (4)

While the community college offers a special potential for meeting the complex needs of this important segment of the culture, and while its philosophy incorporates such a mission, a variety of problems and mitigating circumstances interfere with role actualization. (4)

Some of the problems found by small colleges in the rural setting include: the impoverishment of cultural, social, and recreational services in the area; the lack of part-time jobs for students and positions for graduates; program comprehensiveness with a limited total enrollment; the various inefficiencies of smallness; attracting and developing staff; competition in procurement of grants and other funds; conforming with intricate federal and other regulatory requirements; financial stress; community financial crisis related to lack of diversification of the economic base; lack of time and expertise to research local problems; communications problems in a sparsely populated area; housing of students; lack of exposure and visibility in the media at the various capitals, and within higher education and the community college movement; lower educational levels

of parents and other adults; and a weak economic base in terms of property values scattered over a wide geographic terrain. (15,20)

Rural community colleges often face status problems and problems of competition within the higher education system and with their own larger and more prosperous peer institutions. Small rural institutions do not have the clout with legislative bodies and regulatory agencies that universities, four-year colleges, and their sister community junior colleges in the cities appear to have. Often it is felt that they receive less attention from organizations to which they belong. Many in the smaller institutions feel that even accrediting bodies are dominated by their larger metropolitan counterparts. Rules and formulae for division of funds for operations and for facilities fail to consider their unique problems and circumstances. Government requirements of statistics, surveys, and report documents often seem silly as well as unreasonably burdensome to a small, overworked administrative staff. Researching the professional literature reveals few solutions to problems for these are the unmentioned institutions. Their problems are unresearched, or if by chance they have been studied the dissemination process has failed. The journals are almost as silent as if this vast sector of higher education did not exist.

Leaders in rural community colleges are becoming increasingly activist in their style. They have become outspoken in recent conventions and meetings. They are demanding that the establishment within the realm of education and the power structure within government become responsive to their concerns and the problems of their constituency. The production and dissemination of this monograph by AACJC is illustrative of the willingness of this Association to be as helpful and as responsive as possible to the needs of this broad segment of its membership. Such organizations can be responsive only

when they are provided the occasion and opportunity to be so. Rural community college leaders must present their problems and concerns with directness and clarity, as well as with forcefulness, to those in a position to influence change.

These colleges receive little attention in the legislatures, in associations and national groups, or in educational research and professional literature. Yet they are expected to deliver quality education and diversified services with the efficiency and effectiveness of their relatively wealthy urban counterparts. Their students are deserving, their communities have needs, and they too must respond to bureaucratic red tape. They lack enrollments to benefit from economy of size. They really have but one problem--survival. (20)

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND THE RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE

One of the fundamental philosophical tenets upon which the American democracy is founded is that of equal opportunity. Our political system, economic system, and social institutions all reflect this basic value. Throughout the two hundred years of the nation's history, the meaning of this premise of equal opportunity has been constantly expanded by both legal and extra-legal change. Since equality of educational opportunity underlies and undergirds all other forms of individual liberty to attain one's goals in life, it is incumbent upon a democratic society to bring such opportunities within the reach of all regardless of economic class, ethnicity, or any other element of circumstance--including the geographic separation of space occupied.

The rural family is often penalized in respect to higher education since geography has been found to be a major factor in determining who goes to college. Examinations of the enrollments of community colleges reveal a

predominance of local students. It has been reported that enrollments decline proportionally among students as far as 15 miles from a junior college campus and become almost nonexistent at 50 miles. It has also been shown that the percentage of high school graduates going on to college in the vicinity of a community college is higher than in areas where there is no such institution. Several studies show that the area community college has the most drawing power among the total potential student population than any other institution. Thus geography, the community college, and educational opportunity are indeed closely related. (15)

The public policy making bodies of each state (coordinating boards, public planning agencies, legislatures, and others) must face squarely the issue of conflict between this basic fundamental human right, so well established in our legal system and in our beliefs, and the limited resources which are available (or may be made available) for implementing the principle in the educational delivery system.

It is the belief of those on the Task Force that most public bodies having this responsibility have either failed to consider the issue or have done so only superficially. Some have met the issue with policy statements paying lip service to the principle of bringing equal educational opportunities beyond high school within reach of each citizen and yet have failed to establish a viable system of implementation. Still others have established a delivery system congruent with the goal, but left barriers and hazards preventing its functioning properly.

Ironically, just as the national consciousness appears to be preoccupied with nostalgia, a part of Americana is passing. Rural life styles, as a distinct subculture, are imperiled. While there appears to be a desire to escape from urban life and its attendant problems, the postsecondary educational

delivery system is constrained by ill-conceived rigidities and technicalities and by ill-fitting structures and support systems for serving the clientele of the larger and less populated regions.

This Task Force holds that indeed there should be equal educational opportunity for those living in less populated areas, and that the rural community junior college is a vital component of the delivery system. The Task Force declares that it is in the public interest that rural community colleges maintain comprehensive curricula and programs of service, even though these may cost more per person served. Of course, it is unreasonable to expect no relationship of size and curricular diversification, but that which now exists is far too great to assure an acceptable level of equality of educational opportunity.

The Task Force adopted the following principle and recommended that it be promulgated broadly to public boards and agencies, legislatures and the Congress, and in various AACJC publications. The principle is stated:

> Equal educational opportunity demands that public policy making bodies provide for comprehensiveness in curriculum and in services in all community college units regardless of size or geographic location.

The community college represents a unique American effort to democratize higher education. This assumes, as did Thomas Jefferson, that education is necessary to the preservation of democracy, that education has a principal role in societal change, and that the role of education in upward social mobility helps to equalize opportunities for all who come under its purview. Thus, the community college is an important instrument of a democratic government in assuring a basic right to its citizens.

FINANCING THE SMALL COLLEGE

Anyone who has ever been exposed to a course in economics, and even most who have never been inside a college classroom, recognize the economy of size in business, religion, or other endeavors. Surely those in positions of leadership and policy making in higher education should understand such a concept exceedingly well. Nevertheless, funding formulae abound across the nation which ignore or deny this truth. Interestingly enough, many of these funding systems are justified by a rationale of "treating each institution alike."

Perhaps it is something of a paradox to suggest that such ideas of fairness are grossly unfair. Nevertheless, the Task Force declares that any system of division of resources among institutions which is based upon equal funding per unit is an inequitable system and is prejudicial against the smaller rural community college. This is true whether the "unit" is that of FTE student, average daily attendance, student credit hours, student contact hours, credit hours by program, students by program, or most of the other commonly practiced systems.

Such funding systems translate into disadvantages for the smaller, rural community college in terms of:

A. Staffing. One specialist is required regardless of program size. There are definite staffing economies in both general and specialized education which go with higher enrollment levels.

B. Laboratories and instruction equipment. There is at least a minimum level of equipment holdings necessary to operate a given program. These do not increase in direct proportion to enrollment gains.

C. Library and media resources. Minimal library holdings and media software are necessary for programs and/or courses within programs regardless of the number of students enrolled.

D. Space requirements and space utilization. A program, or perhaps a course, may require special purpose space allocation even though enrollments are limited. A smaller institution is likely to show a lower space utilization ratio for this and other reasons related to its size and its clientele. Standards used must of necessity recognize these differences.

E. Physical plant operation. The larger number of square feet per student necessary in the small rural college leads directly to a higher maintenance and utility cost per student.

F. Administrative services. Basic administrative functions must be performed regardless of the size of the institution. Although these may increase with larger enrollments, they do not increase in direct proportion.

G. Student activities and student services. A broad spectrum of services of specialists must be made available in each institution regardless of size. Those most isolated geographically are likely to be the ones in greatest need of a stimulating program of activities and cultural events.

H. Staff development. In order to keep abreast of development and change, a more extensive and expensive in-service program for staff (both faculty and administrators in proportion to size) may be necessary to overcome geographic isolation and insulation from peers in the field.

The Task Force feels compelled to comment upon what has become an all too common a practice among state governments in the last year or so. This is the excision of a common percentage from the budgets of all state agencies and institutions to meet a financial crisis, real or imagined. Such actions are difficult for any educational institution to absorb since normally an extremely high percentage of their budgets is in personnel costs and already committed. For the smaller institutions, however, the range of flexibility for adjustment is even more limited. Also, the expansion of budgets by a common percentage tends to compound past budgetary inequities and should be avoided in practice.

The Task Force set forth a basic principle of funding which must be recognized by all in positions to influence or control the appointment of financial resources to higher education institutions. It is stated as follows:

> Equity in funding as a means of equalizing educational opportunities among the organizational units in any state system of public and community colleges depends upon the inclusion of some means, mathematical or other, of allowing for the higher costs of operation per unit within the smaller, rural community college.

It is the opinion of the Task Force that, in addition to utilization of all available means of bringing this principle to the attention of the proper persons and agencies, there should be initiated by the AACJC or one of the major university centers for the study of higher education an intensive analysis of various funding systems and formulae with a view toward developing mathematical or other correction factors to prevent inequities in allocation to smaller institutions. To some degree findings may apply to smaller colleges of all types but particular attention must be paid to the points cited earlier. The small two-year college with its efforts toward program comprehensiveness and community services in the accomplishment of its mission present an especially significant and different case type from other forms or levels of higher education.

SMALL COLLEGES AND THE ACCREDITING PROCESS

Perhaps small, rural community college leaders are victims of a special viral form of group paranoia which is transmitted as they meet in informal sessions in the itinerary of professional events. Real or imagined, rural community college people feel misunderstood and sometimes persecuted by various boards,

organizations, state and federal agencies, and by accrediting associations. Not all their complaints may be valid, but the very real feeling that the smaller, rural college does not receive equitable treatment and consideration in the accrediting process is one which should not be minimized in significance.

Smaller community colleges often lack the services of an institutional research specialist and hence may not have on-going institutional research programs of an advanced level of sophistication. Thus they are hampered in producing the self-study document from existing data and in the accumulation of the evaluational studies which are often stressed in the current rationale of regional accrediting bodies. This lack of a well developed, continuing program of research is also a handicap in long range planning. Often a small, comparatively stable, rural community college may not have (and may not need) sophisticated planning documents to demonstrate that there is adequate concern for the future of the institution.

Of special significance is the disproportionately low number of visiting evaluators from smaller, rural institutions, and the apparent tendency too often to disregard the different background of the evaluator who may be sent to the rural community college. Even more serious is the commonly held view that when varying approval periods are practiced, the larger, urban institutions tend to draw longer cycles before revisitation than do the smaller rural community colleges. It appears to many that there is often an "assumed accreditability" of the larger, more prestigious institutions, both two-year and university level, whereas there is a "prove thyself" philosophy practiced in dealing with the smaller, rural colleges.

Administrators in rural colleges complain that often they are expected to have a spectrum of services and programs comparable to large institutions even though these are unfeasible financially. They feel there is an unmerited

stress on "counting" and that standards are often more relevant for four year college and for the transfer curriculum than for a comprehensive institution. They observe that the evaluators often talk with "malcontents" within their colleges, give credence to their view, and never ask for the facts. They strongly recommend better training for evaluators and a screening program to eliminate those who practice inappropriate methods.

The Task Force desires to communicate these concerns in an effective fashion to each regional accrediting body in the nation. Also, the following principle is suggested as a guide in the assignment of personnel in the evaluation process and procedure.

> Although qualitative accreditation is a common concern for institutions of all types and sizes, and thus may involve judgments and input from all sectors, the preponderance of weight in these judgments should rest with representatives from peer institutions.

To the small, rural college this means the inclusion of a majority of representatives from this sector on visiting teams to those institutions and more participation in the decision making processes of accreditation. It suggests further that it would be as appropriate to include representatives from smaller, rural community colleges on visiting teams to institutions of different sizes and types as it is to include those representatives on teams sent into the rural community college.

FEDERAL AND STATE CONSTRAINTS ON SMALL COLLEGE PROGRAMS

Among the constraints upon equality of programs and services among the nation's two-year colleges are those arising from the state and federal bureaucracies.

Since most of the funding is state, most of the constraints are probably state-imposed. However, there is one area in which both types of agencies are equally culpable. This is the mass of reports which, under the guise of accountability, is placed upon all colleges. Other than the fact that most of them are of limited use, their preparation constitutes an undue burden on the small colleges, draining off from student and academic services the time of faculty, counselors, and administrators alike. The task is no less onerous when a college has all the data but an excess amount of time must be used to place it in the format required by that governmental agency.

Many of these stumbling blocks are placed in the path of the small rural community colleges because legislators and other political powers do not understand the philosophy of two year colleges, do not realize the differences between the two year colleges and the four year ones, and do not see the additional problems which come about from being small/rural. Bureaucrats, even those who move from higher education institutions into government service, often appear to be equally oblivious to these ramifications.

The influx of federal funds would ordinarily be expected to help bring equity of educational experiences; but there are factors which negate their effect. Some of them follow:

A. Small/rural colleges cannot qualify for many federal programs.

B. Very little federal money goes to projects that are actually college mission oriented.

C. A small/rural college does not have sufficient personnel available to:

   1. Ferret out the sources of funds, especially to identify what facet of the title is going to be in allocations for a particular year;

   2. Write the project in a form and manner to please the sophisticated federal or foundation readers;

3. Promote the acceptance in Washington once a proposal is submitted, as larger community colleges, senior institutions, and universities do.

The Task Force wishes to emphasize that federal funds are not serving to equalize education for students of two year colleges. Instead, it appears that the syndrome of "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer" is being perpetuated and advanced.

It is imperative that the designers of federal aid programs become cognizant of the fact that the smaller two-year colleges receive a meager share of federal education grant dollars, and that existing inequities in funding are exacerbated rather than mollified by current programs, especially in the grant dispensation mechanisms in vogue. Furthermore, if indeed a central purpose of federal intervention into higher education funding is to enhance equality of educational opportunity, the preponderance of federal institutional grant programs are counter productive to that goal as they are currently administered.

DEVELOPING THE LITERATURE AND RESEARCH BASE ON RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Nearly a decade has passed since a monograph summarizing and describing some of the unique characteristics of the rural community colleges was produced and distributed by the AACJC (15). Since that time only a small number of local or regional conference papers, reports, and a few journal articles have sustained the literature of rural community colleges. Rural education's literature and research still must overcome an eclipse that belies the number of its institutions and their significance nationally. There exists no

disciplined research effort to date that would describe differentially the small rural-based, two-year institutions although these comprise half of the institutions making up the American community-junior college movement. It is surprising that so little attention has been paid by education researchers to this important and vital segment of the ladder system.

The development of a specialized literature and research base is vital to the progress of the rural communities served by these colleges. The informational lag on rural community colleges, their special status and their prospects, must be attacked from several approaches. Among those suggested are:

A. The establishment and maintenance of a collection of literature on rural community colleges by the Association and by other public and private agencies, foundations, and organizations;

B. Leaders within the Association should make an effort to stimulate research and information collection on rural community colleges by various organizations and institutions;

C. The AACJC should seek grant funds for mounting a descriptive and analytical study of the rural community college, its problems and its needs;

D. The AACJC Journal should devote a future issue to the status of the rural community colleges and make an effort to increase the frequency of articles of interest and applicability to the small rural-based institutions; and

E. University centers for the study of higher education should encourage researchers to undertake theses and other research relevant to the non-urban community colleges and their social and economic environments.

At the close of this monograph there is a biliography representing the sources which were available to the Task Force and this writer after a modest searching effort. Most of these are only indirectly related to the rural community college endeavor. Graduate assistants at two university centers

researched the normal sources under direction of highly knowledgeable professorial staff and came up with little. These experiences confirmed the earlier view of Task Force members that there is a paucity of literature on the rural community college.

In the incomparable language of the task force member quoted earlier, the rural community colleges are in places "where even the sunshine has to be pumped in." These words take on special significance when the very real eclipse in the professional media is considered. Has there not indeed been an invisible wall behind the pall of which those in rural community colleges have been relegated their place of professional service in the shadows of anonymity?

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